



U.S. Customs Service

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NEWS

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U.S. CUSTOMS, 10 FOREIGN COUNTRIES, SERVE MULTIPLE SEARCH WARRANTS ON INTERNET CHILD PORNOGRAPHY RING

WASHINGTON, DC—The U.S. Customs Service today announced execution of 7 search warrants on 8 individuals in the United States and as many as 30 simultaneous warrants in 10 foreign countries on members of a private Internet group exchanging and downloading child pornography over the Internet. The foreign countries serving search warrants include the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Japan, Finland, Austria, and Sweden. One arrest was made in the U.S., but additional charges are expected as the investigation develops.

The U.S. Customs Service, assisted by various local, state and federal agencies, began executing search warrants in the early morning hours of Wednesday on the East Coast. Warrants were executed in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Tennessee, Nevada, Oregon and Alaska.

The U.S. targets of the investigation include a U.S. military pilot, a network administrator for a publishing company, a registered nurse, an artist, and several other individuals. U.S. Customs agents seized 12 computers, more than 600 CDs, floppy disks and external drives, more than 200 videos, one digital camcorder, and a book on how to seduce children. Three of the individuals were identified as previously unknown members of the notorious w0nderland child pornography ring that was dismantled in 1998.

"While stopping terrorists and their tools from entering the country is now our top priority, the U.S. Customs Service continues to aggressively pursue those who would exploit children through Internet-based child pornography," said U.S. Customs Commissioner Robert C. Bonner. "This investigation is yet another example of how important international cooperation is to solving these types of cases."

The investigation, dubbed "Operation Artus," began in November 2001 when agents of the German National Police, assisted by local police in Muenster, Germany, executed a search warrant on a German citizen suspected of distributing child pornography. German authorities subsequently discovered that the man had been exchanging child pornography over the Internet through a private Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel. With the man's consent and cooperation, German National Police were provided the nicknames of some of the members of the group.

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German National Police and U.S. Customs determined that a common aim of the members was to find and exchange child pornography in DVD quality movie file format. As a requirement, members had to offer new child pornography material from time to time to remain part of the group. This raised concerns among law enforcement that members were involved in the actual production of child pornography.

As a result of the German investigation, law enforcement from 10 countries identified 46 targets including 8 in the United States. The U.S. Customs Cyber Smuggling Center in Fairfax, Virginia identified the names and addresses of the U.S. targets and coordinated the U.S. enforcement actions with the Department of Justice Child Exploitation Section. The search warrants remain sealed pending the conclusion of all domestic leads.

U.S. Customs encourages people who have information about child pornography to contact the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children through their cyber tip line at WWW.CYBERTIPLINE.COM.

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